Topological Physics in HgTe-based Quantum Devices

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Abstract

Suitably structured HgTe is a topological insulator in both 2- (a quantum well wider than some 6.3 nm) and 3 (an epilayer grown under tensile strain) dimensions. The material has favorable properties for quantum transport studies, i.e. a good mobility and a complete absence of bulk carriers, which allowed us to demonstrate variety of novel transport effects. One aspect of these studies is topological superconductivity, which can be achieved by inducing superconductivity in the topological surface states of these materials. Special emphasis will be given to recent results on the ac Josephson effect. We will present data on Shapiro step behavior that is a very strong indication for the presence of a gapless Andreev mode in our Josephson junctions, both in 2- and in 3-dimensional structure. An additional and very direct evidence for the presence of a zero mode is our observation of Josephson radiation at an energy equal to half the superconducting gap. Controlling the strain of the HgTe layers strain opens up yet another line a research. We have recently optimized MBE growth of so-called virtual substrates ((Cd,Zn)Te superlattices as a buffer on a GaAs substrate), that allow us to vary the strain from 0.4% tensile to 1.5% compressive. While tensile strain turns 3-dimensional HgTe into a narrow gap insulator, compressive strain turns the material into a topological (Weyl) semimetal, exhibiting clear signs of the Adler-Bell-Jackiw anomaly in its magnetoresistance. In quantum wells, compressive strain allows inverted energy gaps up to 60 meV.

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